

KOKUA HAWAII ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW WITH
Darrell Tagalog



Darrell Tagalog
Photo courtesy Tagalog family

Darrell Tagalog was in his early teens when his family was served with an eviction notice and his father Pete Tagalog as president of the Ota Camp Makibaka Association successfully led the more than 130 residents in an eviction fight in Waipahu. Darrell, now a Big Island resident, was interviewed on March 12, 2017, by telephone by Gary T. Kubota who lives on Maui.

GK: Good morning, Darrell Tagalog. Please tell me where you were raised?

DT: I was born in 1958 and raised on the North Shore with my grandparents, then moved to Waipahu with my parents Pete and Sally Tagalog. But I spent my holidays and summers with my grandparents and cousins on the North Shore.

GK: What do you recall was the reaction to the notice of eviction in Ota Camp?

DT: It was like an abrupt thing. All of a sudden, everybody was talking in panic. They didn't know what was happening. A lot of elders were all worried. We didn't know too much about what was happening. All we knew was that somebody was kicking us out. We were living in this rural lifestyle, and then, all of a sudden we had to move. It was like that for a few weeks.

GK: Then what happened?

DT: Then all the neighbors came together, and they kept on talking and wondering what was happening and if the land owner really could do that? The guy we paid our rent to every month said another guy bought the property and the other guy's gonna break everything down and build expensive homes. A lot of the elders never know where to go.

Then, all of a sudden, my dad took action, trying to figure out how we can all come together and fight the eviction. He went around the neighborhood, and we, as children, sometimes had to go with him.

GK: Was there a lot of work for him in organizing?

Darrell Tagalog Interview

DT: I remember going with him day and night and just going to each neighbor and talking to them individually. My dad was always reaching out to get support also from lawyers, politicians, labor leaders like Major Okada (ILWU leader), and groups at the University of Hawaii.

GK: How was it for you?

DT: As a young kid, it was fun because we got to go to the neighbors' houses. We didn't know exactly what they were talking about. For us, it was like an activity. We were just getting out of the house and going to the neighbor's house and visiting, and we were having dinners and talking. A little later, my dad talked with us about what was happening. Then, we found ourselves going around the island, house to house, having people sign our support petition.

GK: How was it?

DT: My dad would say somehow, we should all fight and do something. At that point, he didn't know what to do, but he just needed to do something.

GK: It was your dad who invited us to come live in the camp. In the beginning, Kokua Hawaii members Jim Young and Randy Yamaguchi moved in. Later, Kokua Hawaii leaders said I should move in to help.

DT: Yeah, when Kokua Hawaii moved in and other supporters helped with research, he got little bit more information to see what he could do. He read books and learned from the civil rights movement, the Native American movement. He liked Martin Luther King. He said he learned from all these guys, and he's gonna use what he learned from these people to fight all of this.

GK: Right. Jim Young and Randy Yamaguchi were attending Leeward Community College.

DT: That's where my dad met them. He was attending college, too. Jim was the photographer. Randy took us around a lot.

GK: Who were the other supporters?

DT: Gail Hamasu (Waipahu High School graduate) made the programs for the youths, to kind of like educate us about what's happening and to take pictures and to remind us that this was something that was very historical. I thought the youths were very fortunate to be there and to grow up fast, learning about politics. It made us a little more ahead of our time. My dad made us look at life in a way that avoided pettiness. The experience made us hang around with you folks, more hip, long hair, all that stuff. There was something that my dad never did teach us, but you folks did: surfing, going out, music, the quality of life and cooking.

GK: Right. I myself remember Kokua Hawaii member Jo Ibarra organizing and dressing the kids to put on a skit about the landlord and Ota Camp, during one of the parties held at Ota Camp. The kids and the parents enjoyed it. It happened midway through the music and some dancing.

DT: Actually, it was the socializing that came with the supporters. I mean, it was more like a breath of fresh air to have you guys there because it changed our lives. We got along with you folks, and you guys took an interest in our well-being.

GK: Well, we did what we could to make things easier. I remember when you and Glenn went with me to gather coconut fronds for decorating the Nipa Hut float for the Waipahu Diamond Jubilee. The adults were either too old and the rest were working that day. I climbed seven to eight trees and cut the fronds and some coconuts. That was a lot of work.

DT: Yeah. I remember supporters started a free clinic too with Dr. Duke Choy (the husband of Kokua Hawaii member Mary Choy).

GK: You know when you talk about the fighters, let me tell you. You know where they got the pig? They got it from George Santos, the Kalama Valley farmer who got evicted.

DT: That's where it came from?

GK: Yeah. George would sell it to them at a discount. Johnny would negotiate with George up at George's farm in Pearl City. We brought the pig to Johnny Dombrique, and his family and relatives would butcher the pig and cook it for Ota Camp celebrations.

DT: What you guys did, actually was bring different people together. This struggle brought everybody together and made it more solid. Because when we were living there in the beginning, the community wasn't as solid. Nobody was really close. We had two different dialects. Living in the same place when this thing happened, everything mixed together. We had to interact with each other.

GK: Was there anything you learned from this?

DT: From watching that thing happen, I saw how my father tried to be cool, and I know sometimes he just wanted to smack them in the head. But he had to keep his cool, because he was the leader and set the example. Us guys as kids, we just ask him, "Why don't you just go over and just straighten them out or something like that?" But it wasn't that way. We learned how to be patient. You have to work together.

GK: Right.

DT: And you folks enforced it with us, trying to look at different views of how everything is handled. Yeah?

Darrell Tagalog Interview

GK: Yeah. And also, we supported your father. You know, Kokua Hawaii and most people in Ota Camp understood that they needed to respect him for what he was doing.

DT: Yes, exactly. He really spent a lot of time thinking, and he spent a lot of time figuring out what is the right way.

GK: I know it wasn't easy. That's why we sometimes took some of the youths on outings to the beach on weekends.

DT: I actually got close to my dad and worked with him to expand the meeting area. I learned carpentry from my dad because he had to build our house bigger, so we could hold the meetings.

GK: Oh. (Laughing). It was amazing that Pete found time to expand his house, when he had a lot of other responsibilities.

DT: I know the struggle put a lot of pressure on him. He was gone all of the time, and he was in school and he was in meetings. Sometimes, when he was in a meeting, it seemed like free time for us. We got along with other kids in the village. When we started to grow up and be in the meetings, and listen, we learned exactly what this struggle was about. And how important it was. It made me interested in life to know that kind of stuff.

GK: How so?

DT: It made me see I had different options, but I started studying political science at Leeward Community College, but then decided to take a different route. I ended going into communication, electronics, then I got my electrician's license and moved to the Big Island to be with kumu hula and song writer Pua Case, an activist eventually involved in the protest against the building of a new telescope on Mauna Kea. She wrote lot of songs about the *Hokulea*.

By that time about 1999, the Ota Camp struggle was finished. I helped as a volunteer working on the double-hulled canoe *Makalii* on the Big Island and worked as an electrician on the Big Island and Oahu. I then went into becoming an acupuncturist and massage therapist at a resort.

GK: Wow. I didn't know that. Congratulations.

DT: Thank you.



Pete Tagalog
Photo © Ed Greevy